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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of conversations with mothers and peers on adolescents' beliefs about gender roles, their career plans, and their plans for managing work and family responsibilities. Approximately 1,000 twelfth grade students, evenly divided by gender, were interviewed. Results concerning children's beliefs about gender roles indicated that: (1) girls were more nontraditional than boys; (2) the more adolescents talked with their friends about the future, the more nontraditional gender role beliefs they expressed; (3) the more adolescents talked with their mothers about the future, the fewer nontraditional beliefs they expressed; and (4) girls who talked a lot with their mothers about their futures were more nontraditional than other girls in their gender role beliefs. Concerning beliefs about career, results indicated that boys desired a powerful job more than did girls; and the more time adolescents spent talking about their futures with their mothers or friends, the more likely they were to desire a powerful job. Concerning work and family plans, results indicated that girls were more likely than boys to plan to take time off from work to have children; and adolescents who talked a lot about the future with their mothers or friends were more likely than other adolescents to plan to change their work schedule once they had children. (PM)

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Poster presented for the 1993 Society for Research on Child Development Meeting
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March, 1993

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The Impact of Mothers and Peers on Adolescents' Gender Role Traditionality and Plans for the Future

Adolescence is a time when children begin talking with their peers and parents about their plans for the future. These conversations may be related to adolescents' gender role beliefs as well as the kinds of plans adolescents make about their career and management of work and family responsibilities. These plans differ in terms of gender role traditionality. For example, some girls anticipate staying at home with their children (a traditional plan) whereas other girls plan on working full time and putting their children in day care (a non-traditional plan).

Adolescence is also a time when achieving gender role transcendence, i.e., the movement toward androgyny, is heightened (Eccles & Bryan, 1991). The process of gender role transcendence depends on social-contextual factors. For example, Eccles & Bryan (1991) suggest that adolescents who (1) have androgynous role models, (2) live in environments that facilitate the questioning of one's future, and (3) question the relationship between gender roles and their career paths are likely to transcend gender role prescriptions and have androgynous identities. For other individuals, adolescence may be a time of gender role intensification, i.e., a stronger identification with traditional sex-role prescriptions, thus making a sex-typed identity more likely.

In support of Eccles & Bryan's theory of gender role transcendence, Belansky, Clements, & Eccles (1992) found that adolescent girls who talked a great deal with their mothers about their future were more non-traditional in their gender role beliefs than girls who spent less time talking with their mothers about future plans. The reverse was true for boys. Additionally, Belansky et al (1992) found that the more adolescents spoke to their mothers about future plans, the more likely they thought they would work outside of the home when they have young children.

The present research focuses on Eccles & Bryan's (1991) contention that adolescents living in environments which facilitate the questioning of one's future are

likely to transcend gender role prescriptions. Our paper asks three questions: (1) What are the differential roles of conversations with peers vs. mothers on adolescents' gender role traditionality? (2) Does the traditionality of adolescents' gender role beliefs relate to adolescents' career plans and plans for managing work and family responsibilities? (3) What effect does gender role traditionality have on the relationship between the amount of time adolescents spend talking with peers vs. mothers and adolescents' career plans and plans for managing work and family responsibilities?

Predictions

Because adolescence is said to be a time when peer influences are piqued, it is expected that discussions with peers about the future will relate to gender role non-traditionality and future plans more often than will discussions with mothers. Additionally, we expect that the more adolescents talk with their peers and mothers about the future, the more they will have non-traditional gender role beliefs and plans for the future.

Method

Subjects.

Approximately 1,000 twelfth graders were recruited in schools from twelve districts in southeastern Michigan to participate in the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT), a longitudinal study of adolescent development. The subjects were predominantly white, with working-middle class backgrounds and were evenly divided by gender.

Materials/Procedure.

Attachment A has examples of questions that were included in the questionnaire. Students filled out questionnaires that asked a variety of questions including items pertaining to the amount of time adolescents spend talking with their friends and mothers about future plans and traditional vs. non-

traditional gender role attitudes. Additionally, adolescents were asked to report their willingness to take time off from work to have children and their willingness to change their work schedules in order to meet their children's needs later on in life. Additionally, they were asked about their career aspirations.

Results[1]

Path analyses were conducted via a series of multiple regressions. All exogenous variables were allowed to correlate with each other. In order to simplify the figures, lines were not drawn to show the zero order correlations between exogenous variables.

Predicting Gender Role Transcendence (See Figure One)

- Girls are more non-traditional in their gender role beliefs compared to boys.
- The more adolescents talk with their friends about the future, the more non-traditional gender role beliefs they have.
- The more adolescents talk with their mothers about the future, the less non-traditional gender role beliefs they have.
- Girls who talk a lot with their mothers about the future are more non-traditional than girls who talk less with their mothers. The opposite is true for boys.

Predicting Goals Pertaining to the Desire to Have a Powerful Job: (See Figure Two)

- Boys, more so than girls, desire a powerful job.
- The more time adolescents spend talking with their friends about their future plans, the more they desire a powerful job position.
- Adolescents who talk a lot with their mothers about the future are more

[1] All findings are reported in terms of models which control for the exogenous variables (and the non-traditionality of gender role beliefs when predicting plans for the future).

likely to want a powerful job position.

- Adolescents who are non-traditional desire a powerful job position more so than adolescents who are traditional.

Predicting Plans Pertaining to the Management of Work and Family Responsibilities: (See Figures Three and Four)

- Girls are more likely than boys to plan to take time off from work to have children and to change their work schedule once becoming a parent.
- Adolescents who talk a lot with their friends about the future are more willing to plan to take time off from work to have children and to plan on changing their work schedule once they have children.
- Adolescents who talk a lot with their mothers about the future are more willing to plan on changing their work schedule once they have children.
- Non-traditional adolescents are more willing to take time off from work to have children compared to more traditional adolescents.

Conclusions

We have sought out to test the role of talking with peers and mothers in the transcendence of gender role prescriptions. Because adolescence is said to be a time when peer influences are piqued, it was expected that discussions with peers about the future would relate to gender role non-traditionality and future plans more often than would discussions with mothers. There is some evidence in support of this contention. For example, we found that the amount of talking with friends about future plans relates to adolescents' plans to take time off from work to have children. However, this relationship was not found with the amount of time spent talking with mothers about future plans. Nevertheless, talking with mothers and talking with peers both relate to non-traditionality of gender role beliefs, the desire to have a powerful job position, and willingness to change one's work schedule in order to meet children's

needs.

We also suggested that having environments conducive to exploring future goals (i.e., being able to talk with mothers and friends about the future) would relate to more non-traditional gender role beliefs and plans for the future. There is strong support for this contention when considering the amount adolescents spend talking with their friends about the future. In all cases, talking with friends about the future positively relates to non-traditional gender role beliefs and plans for the future. However, there is no support for the contention that the amount of talking with mothers about the future would relate to more non-traditional gender role beliefs. In fact, the more time adolescents spend talking with their mothers about the future, the *less* they have non-traditional gender role beliefs. However, girls who talk a great deal with their mothers about their future are more non-traditional in their gender role beliefs than girls who spend less time talking with their mothers about future plans. The reverse was true for boys. There is support for the contention that talking with mothers about the future relates to more non-traditional plans. For instance, talking with mothers positively relates to the desire to have a powerful job position (a non-traditional plan for a female) and willingness to change one's work schedule to meet children's needs (a non-traditional plan for a male).

Adolescence is a crossroads for gender role transcendence or gender role intensification (Eccles & Bryan, 1991). Talking with friends and mothers about future plans relates to non-traditionality of gender role beliefs and plans for the future.

REFERENCES

Belansky, E.S., Clements, P., & Eccles, J.S. (1992). Adolescence: A Crossroads for Gender Role Transcendence vs. Gender Role Intensification. Poster presented at the Society for Research on Adolescence, Washington, D.C.

Eccles, J.S. & Bryan (1991). Adolescents: Critical crossroad in the path of gender role development. In M. Stevenson (Ed.), Gender Roles Through the Lifespan. University of Wisconsin.

Attachment A

Amount of Time Spent Talking with Mother About the Future:

1. My mother and I talk about my future job and educational plans.
2. My mother and I talk about my future family plans.
3. My mother and I talk about my personal problems.

Amount of Time Spent Talking with Friends About the Future:

1. My friends and I talk about my future job and educational plans.
2. My friends and I talk about my future family plans.
3. My friends and I talk about my personal problems.

Examples of Traditional vs. Non Traditional Gender Role Beliefs:

1. A wife's relationship with her husband is better if she doesn't place too much importance on her job.
2. A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.
3. If a husband and wife both work full-time, the husband should do half of the housework and child care.
4. It bothers me to see a man being told what to do by a woman.
5. Women can have just as fulfilling a life without children as they can have with children.
6. A man is less likely to marry a woman who plans to pursue a career.

Managing Work and Family:

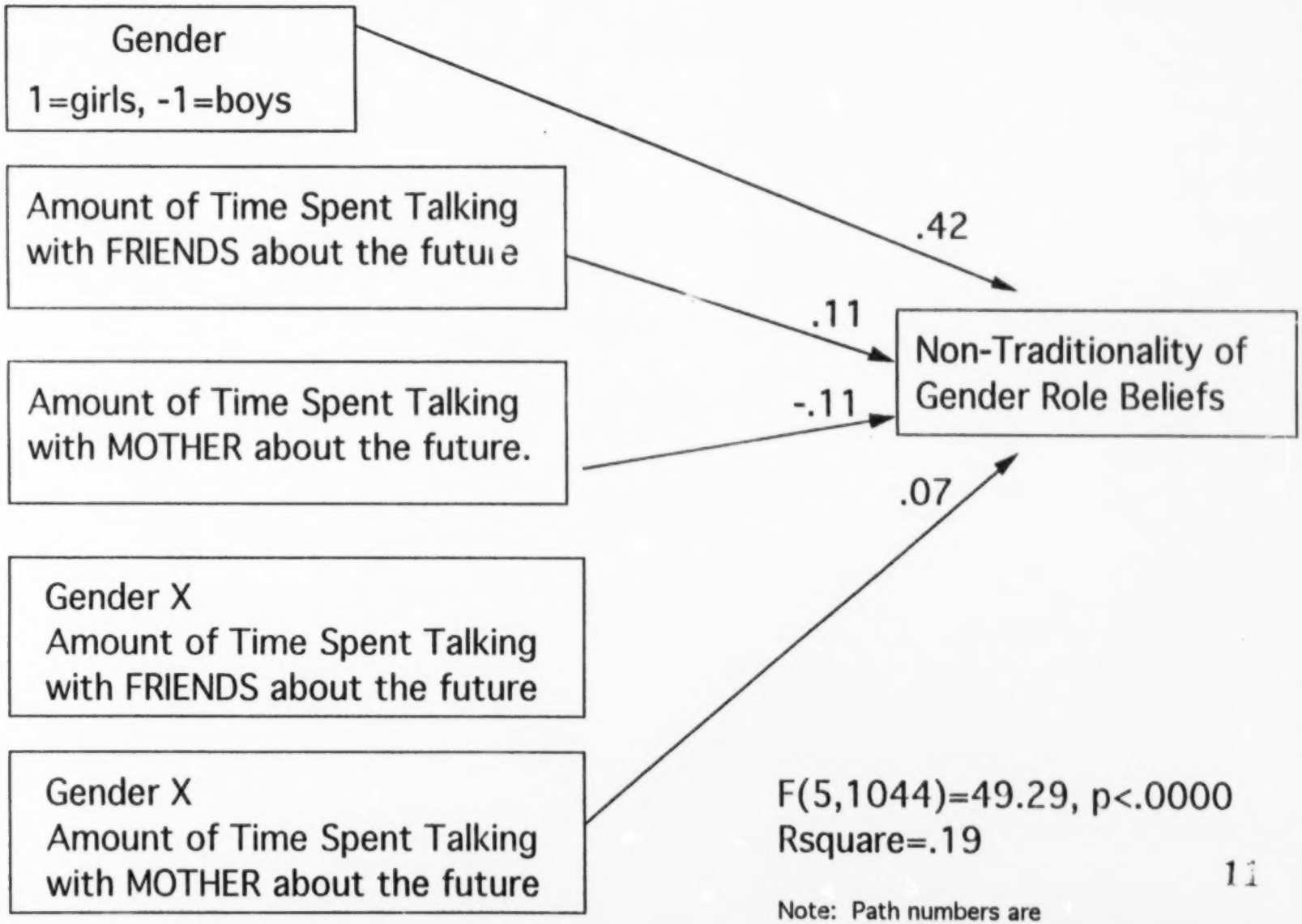
1. Do you plan to take off time from work or school to raise your children?
2. Do you plan to change your work schedule (like work part-time or change your work hours) in order to meet your children's needs?

Powerful Job Position:

How much would you like a job that:

1. ...has high status and prestige.
2. ...you are your own boss most of the time.
3. ...you get a chance to participate in decision making.

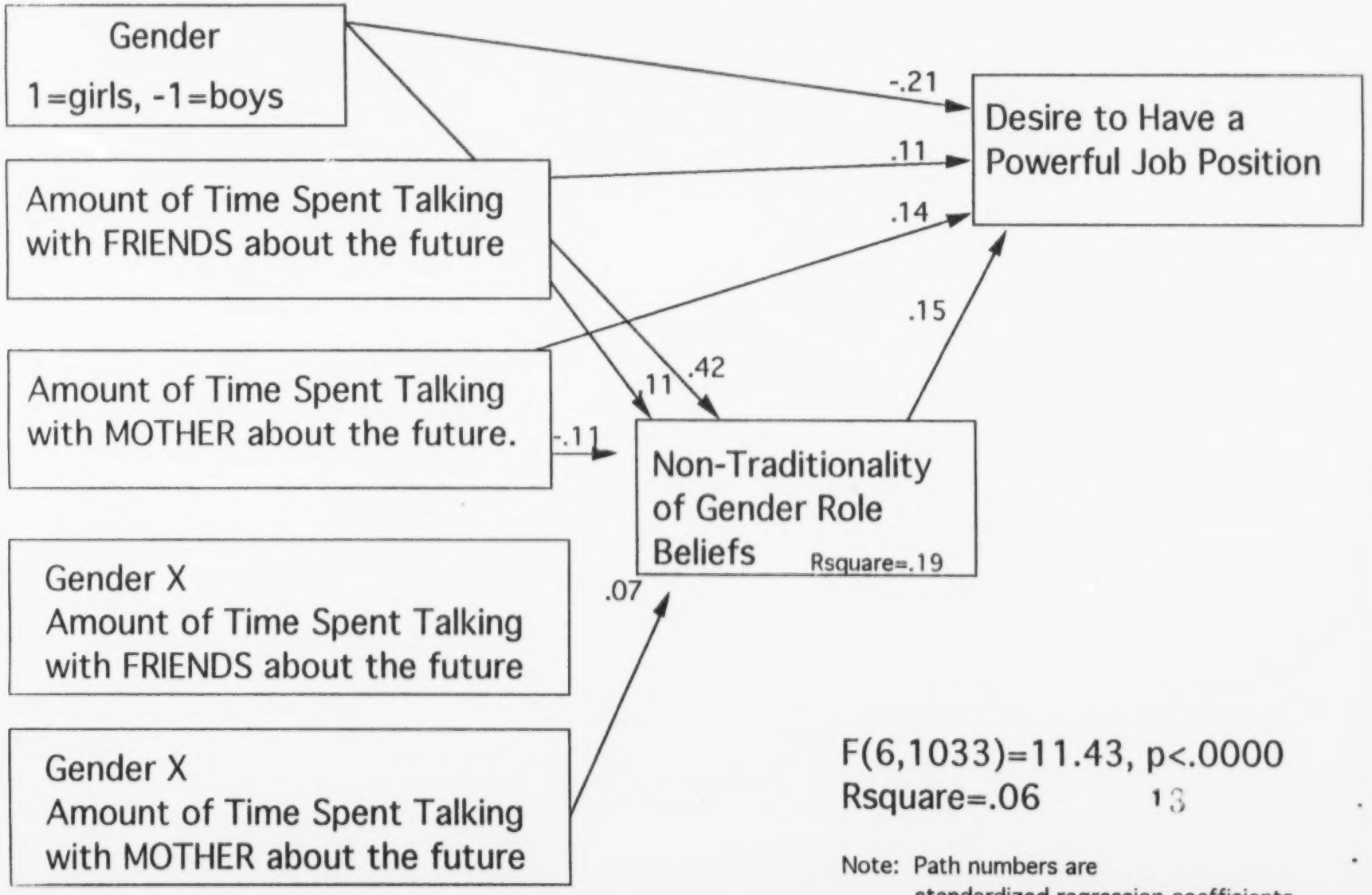
Figure One.
Predicting Non-Traditionality of Gender Role Beliefs


Gender
1=girls, -1=boys
Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future.
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future
.42
.11
-.11
.07
Non-Traditionality of Gender Role Beliefs

F(5,1044)=49.29, p<.0000
Rsquare=.19

Note: Path numbers are standardized regression coefficients.

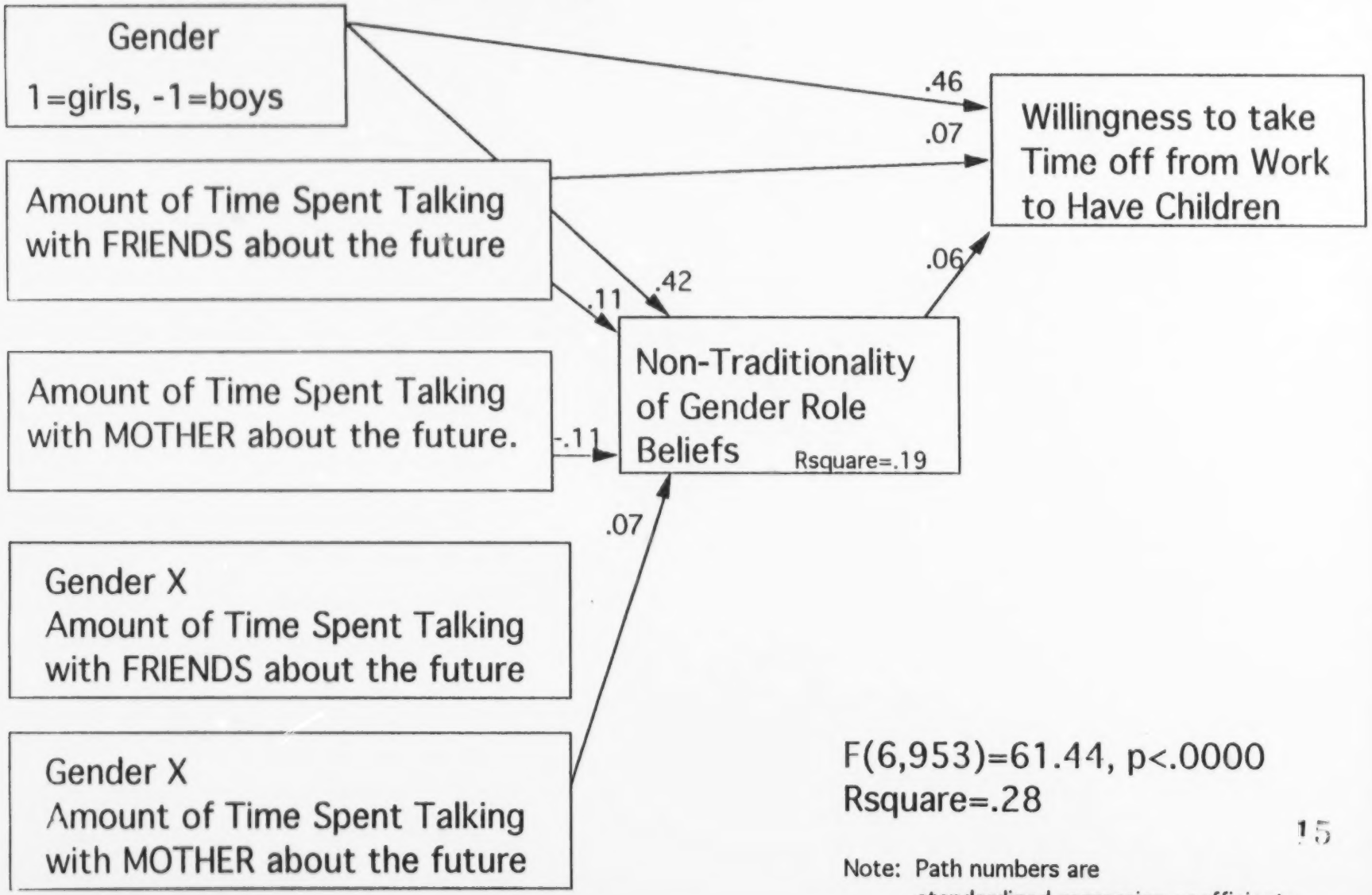
Figure Two.
Predicting Adolescents' Desire to Have a Powerful Job


Gender
1=girls, -1=boys
Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future.
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future
Non-Traditionality of Gender Role Beliefs
Rsquare=.19
Desire to Have a Powerful Job Position
-.21
.11
.14
.15
.11
.42
-.11
.07

F(6,1033)=11.43, p<.0000
Rsquare=.06

Note: Path numbers are standardized regression coefficients.

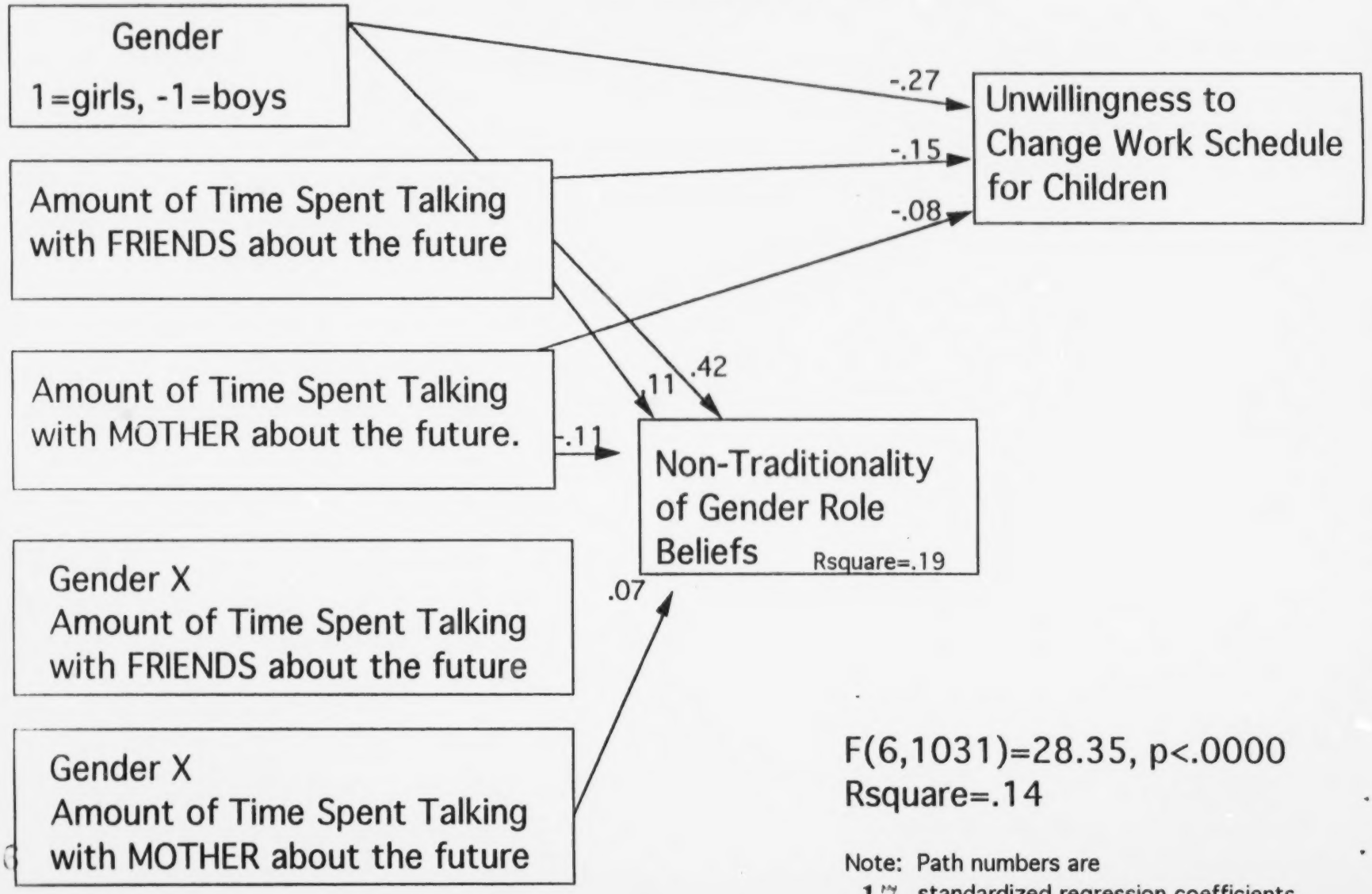
Figure Three.
Predicting Adolescents' Future Plans to Take Time Off From Work to Have Children


Gender
1=girls, -1=boys
Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future.
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future
Non-Traditionality of Gender Role Beliefs
Rsquare=.19
Willingness to take Time off from Work to Have Children
.46
.07
.42
.11
.06
-.11
.07

F(6,953)=61.44, p<.0000
Rsquare=.28

Note: Path numbers are standardized regression coefficients.

Figure Four.
Predicting Adolescents' Unwillingness to Change Their Work Schedule To Meet Their Children's Needs


Gender
1=girls, -1=boys
Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future.
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with FRIENDS about the future
Gender X Amount of Time Spent Talking with MOTHER about the future
Unwillingness to Change Work Schedule for Children
Non-Traditionality of Gender Role Beliefs Rsquare=.19
-.27
-.15
-.08
.42
.11
-.11
.07

F(6,1031)=28.35, p<.0000
Rsquare=.14

Note: Path numbers are standardized regression coefficients.